Statues stolen from museums

†2138. SHRI MAHENDRA SAHNI: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any information about the number of museums from where statues have been stolen alongwith the number of States including Bihar where these museums are located;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of agencies which have been engaged by Government to investigate into the matter?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) and (b) Centralised information on this subject is not maintained by this Ministry in respect of Museums under the control of State Governments, local bodies and private societies, trusts etc. However, a report has been received from the State Government of Bihar that 18 bronze idols from Patna Museum were missing on 26th September, 2006,17 of which have been recovered.

The position in respect of Museums under this Ministry for the last three years is as under:

(i) One Buddha Head (Sarnath) was stolen from the Indian Museum, Kolkata on 29.12.2004.

(ii) One Terracotta toy cart frame and two terracotta wheels have been reported stolen from the Archaeological Museum, Kalibangan, District Hanumangarh, Rajasthan under the Archaeological Survey of India during January, 2006.

(c) The cases of theft in Patna Museum and Indian Museum have been handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation and the ASI matter has been referred to the Rajasthan Police.

Threat to Ajanta paintings by rain water

2139. SHRIMATI HEMA MALINI: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that due to extensive use of cement in order to conserve the priceless cave paints at Ajanta have been ruined;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) whether it is also a fact that Ajanta's most famous 'Bodhisattva Vajrapani' and 'Padmapani' paintings in cave 1 along with elephant panel from the Jataka Tat!e in cave 17 are being threatened by rain water;

(c) if so, what is the expected amount of loss has caused due to leakages in caves and what role conservationists are playing in order to save the famous Ajanta from further deterioration in future; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) The priceless cave paintings of Ajanta Caves are in a good state of preservation. Cement concrete has been used only for the restoration of rock-cut facades and the missing pillars of the caves.

(b) The famous "Bodhisattva Vajrapani" and "Padmapani" paintings in Cave No. 1 and the "Elephant Jataka" panel in Cave No. 17 are in good state of preservation. Archaeological Survey of India had taken appropriate conservation measures for protection of the Elephant Jataka panel from the effect of rain water in Cave No. 17.

(c) and (d) Ajanta Caves have been excavated in the Deccan trap which have several natural horizontal and vertical cooling joints that allow seepage during periods of heavy rainfall. Most of the leakage points in the Ajanta Caves are in verandahs of the caves.

The problems of leakages and surface water management had been referred to the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and the Central Water Power Research Station (CWPRS), Pune. Based on the studies carried out by the GSI, the contour drains at four different levels have been repaired. The CWPRS is preparing the design for another drain.

A panel of international expert has already been set up for monitoring the conservation of the caves and the paintings under the ongoing Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) project. Three meetings of the Committee have taken place in 2004, 2005 and 2006 during which the conservation problems were discussed in detail. The Committee has expressed satisfaction on the conservation measures taken up by the Archaeological Survey of India for the preservation of Ajanta paintings.